DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 097 597 CG 009 222

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TITLE Power as a Factor in Unilaterally and Bilaterally Coercive Situations.
PUB DATE Sep 74
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (New Orleans, Louisiana, August 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Conflict; *Interaction Process Analysis; *Power Structure; *Relationship; *Social Action; *Social Behavior; Speeches

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept and definition of social power as it relates to an understanding of social behavior at all levels. The author attempts to differentiate power situations in which the flow of influence is primarily unilateral from an identifiable source to a target, from those in which there is a more dynamic give-and-take between the interacting entities. He argues that while we know a great deal about the former (unilateral) types of interactions, we know very little of the latter. This is unfortunate, for it is the latter (bilateral) type of power relationship which characterizes much of social life. The author attempts to delve into some of the differences inherent in these various kinds of power relations regarding the decision to trust or not to trust another person, organization, or nation. He focuses on the variable of trust rather than on that of social cooperation, since the latter variable can be elicited in numerous ways that do not imply genuine "cooperativeness" as existing between parties to conflict. (Author/PC)

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Power as a Factor in Unilaterally and Bilaterally Coercive Situations[1]

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I would like to talk about a concept which has generated much heat and smoke in the social disciplines, that of social power. Even though I have never seen (and have never been able to construct) a satisfactory generic definition of that concept, I believe it remains a central one (with the notions of conflict and influence) for understanding social behavior at all levels. Specifically, today I will try to differentiate power situations in which the flow of influence is pretty much unilateral from an identifiable source to a target from those in which there is a more dynamic give-and-take between the interacting entities. I hope to argue that while we know a great deal about the former (unilateral) types of interactions, we know only the barest outlines of the latter. I will contend that in this regard we are unfortunate, for it is the latter (bilateral) sort of power relation which characterizes much of social life. In addition, I will try to tease out some of the differences inherent in these various kinds of power relations regarding the decision to trust or not to trust another person, organization, or nation. I focus on the variable of trust rather than on that of social cooperation, since the latter variable can be elicited in numerous ways that do not imply any true "cooperativeness" as existing between parties to conflict.

Unilateral Power

The ideal-type unilateral power situation requires only three elements for structural definition: a source or influencer, a communication or message

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system (verbal or nonverbal), and a targe of influence. Of course, the source has characteristics or attributes which facilitate or impede the influence process, as does the target; in addition, it is certainly well known that the choice of influence mode by the source has far-reaching effects on whether or not target acquiesces to source demands. But, and notwithstanding enough complicating factors to fill several texts (cf., e.g., Tedeschi et al., 1973), the unilateral or unequal power case is much the old human learning paradigm: a stimulus dispenser (source) displays some culturally recognized signal (communication system) into the ongoing activities of an organism (target), and observes the response. The distinguishing feature of power and influence relations from the remainder of these sorts of interactions (e.g., pigeon & experimenter) is that in the former the participants are usually presumed to be in social conflict, and the influence sequence is a calculated move on the part of the source to change target's behavior in a way favorable to source's goal attainment strategies.

It is in these unilateral power relationships that we see (cf. Tedeschi & Bonoma, 1972) the majority of the theoretical work on social power, as well as the overwhelming bulk of the empirical literature on influence relationships e.g., Kipnis, 1974). On the theoretical side, there has been a fairly good consenus since the early 1900's at least that power should be taken to mean the "production of intended effects," in Russell's terms (see also Bachrach & Baratz, 1963; Dahl, 1957; Heider, 1958; Kelman, 1961; and Weber, 1947). The empirical analog to the study of these unilateral relationships has generally been some variant of the mixed-motive simulation game, usually supplemented with an externality (say, giving threats to one of the parties) to make the source stronger than the target. Then, source acts to send these threats to the passive target in order to coerce the latter into making some (usually self-disadvantageous) choice which will benefit the former. Of course, if

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target elects not to choose in accord with source's wishes, there is always the stick of punishment.

Discounting the more sophisticated nuances of source factors and target resistance variables (cf. Tedeschi et al., 1973 for a review), several firmly supported empirical propositions come from these analyses. Most obviously, and directly supporting reinforcement theory viewpoints, is that target's compliance (a direct index of sources "ability to produce intended effects") is a linear function of the punishment threatened for noncompliance. A somewhat more sophisticated and not completely confirmed corollary of this proposition (cf. Bonoma, in press) is that the greater the range of punishments through which a source can move a target for noncompliance (i.e., the greater source's punishment capability), the more compliance will be forthcoming.

The second major factor affecting unilateral power relationships when coercion is the influence mode is the credibility of the threat: operationally, the higher the proportion of times source has punished noncompliance in the past compared to the number of opportunities source had to do so, the more compliance will be forthcoming in the future from the threatened target. Of course, as Tom Milburn (1974) notes in his paper today, these relationships are qualified by the nature of both the punishment threatened and the demand made; but in general, they obtain cross-situationally, across interaction levels (e.g., dyads vs. groups), and across participants.

As William Riker (1974) pointed out in an excellent theoretical essay, and as Tedeschi and his colleagues (cf. Nacci & Tedeschi, n.d.; Paschke et al., 1973; Schlenker et al., 1973) have demonstrated in a series of empirical studies, trust is relative easy to define in these unilateral power relationships. If we accept as a working definition of trust a reliance by the target in the truth of source's communications during a risky situation (e.g., one in which target has something to lose, like a conflict), then trust is identical with credibility.

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That is, we will tend to trust (rely on) those whose communications have been reliable in the past--in a unilaterally coercive situation, that source who has been highly credible will be "trusted" by targets to punish future non-compliances with the stipulated punishment. It follows from this position (1) he who weilds the biggest stick during interpersonal or international conflict will be most effective, as well (2) he who matches his threatening words with his punishing deeds most consistently. The latter, in unilateral coercion situations, will also be the most trusted, since trust is equated with reliance on the truth-value of source's influence attempts.

Although it seems a bit unusual to trust someone to punish us, this is about the only sort of trust a weak target can have in a unilateral coercive power relationship. If target wishes to predict which other (i.e., influence-related) actions or communications of source will be trustworthy, Riker (1974) provides a "meta-rule-of-thumb:" rely only on those future actions or predictions which appear to be in source's own best interests. Thus, predictability, is the major determinant of trust in unilateral power relationships.

Several not so obvious implications follow for the weilder of unilateral coercive power during conflict: (1) It is always true that only the target (i.e., the weaker party) has a decision to trust or not to trust, since he is majorly the recipient of influence communications. Thus, in unilateral power situations, only the weak must trust; the strong can just act. (2) As Riker contends, the weak must pick actions which source has a self-interest in performing; otherwise, source's actions are unpredictable in the absence of experience. (3) Demonstrations of resolve, to the extent to which these indicate a readiness to punish for noncompliance (cf., e.g., those recommended for nations by Kissinger, 1969) without actually administering punishment, weaken both credibility and trust. Sabre-rattling, whether perpetrated by husbands on wives with regard to the family car or by nuclear nations on

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non-nuclears with regard to territorial infringements, can only lead to a weakening of source's power position through a reduction in the former's credibility by display without implementation. (4) Too high a punishment level weakens both credibility and influence effectiveness, since its use is either unthinkable (e.g., preemptive nuclear strike for a diplomatic affront) or would threaten the continued viability and hence exploitability, of the target. In sum, the most "trustworthy" and hence effective source of coercive power during interpersonal or international social conflict possesses a wide range of punishment capability gradated to varying degrees of noncompliance by a target, all of which are employed with high or total reliability once a threat has been made. From target's point of view, a strong source is to be most trusted who has a self-interest in performing the action desired.

The Mixed Case

There is a second and more frequently occurring form of coercive influence interaction, that generally termed bargaining. The structure of this interaction seems to fall about midway between what I have discussed as unilateral power interactions and what I will discuss as bilateral power situations. In the former, we have seen that there is a very low level of both mutuality and dynamism in the interaction: a static source if unilaterally exercising influence over a static target, who can only obey or defy the attempt. In a bargaining situation, both participants are "armed" as viable sources, capable of making offers, delivering threats, and settling (or not) on some mutually accepted solution. However, bargaining interaction is of only medium dynamism and mutuality because of the "turn-taking" conceptualization of influence attempts: in the usual treatments, A makes an offer, B responds with a counteroffer, and so on until deadlock or agreement. Discounting coercive externalities possible in these sorts of situations, each offer and

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counteroffer may be seen to possess both coercive and inducement properties--to the extent to which A's pattern of choices is represented by a series of concessions to B, a continuation of the pattern is promised on the next round. To the extent to which A is a "tough" bargaininer and makes few concessions, he threatens to end the interaction in a mutually unsatisfactory deadlock unless B raises his own level of concessions (cf. Bonoma, in press).

Theoretical treatments of power in the bargaining context include those treatments of all social life as exchange (cf., e.g., Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961), as well as those more specific power theories (e.g., Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950) which posit specific resource "trades" by conflict participants. The empirical work on influence (cf. Druckman, 1973) in these bargaining settings has focused mainly on the "horse-trading" paradigm, regardless of whether it is a horse or only a used car in A's possession which is being bid on by B. Although the evidence is not nearly so compelling nor unidirectional as that which butresses unilateral power contexts, it can be generally stated that concession-rate variables (cf. Druckman et al, 1972) function in the theoretically-predicted manner as coercive devices. That is, a source who employs a positively accelerating (i.e., increasing) concession strategy will obtain more compliance in the form of reciprocal concessions (and mutually satisfactory bargaining solutions) from his target than one who employs negatively accelerating bargaining moves.

Thus, and with reference to trust in thse quasi-bilateral settings, predictability is again seen to be a major determinant. He who has reliably acted to bargain in a certain manner in the past will be trusted by the other to do so in the future. However, I contend that we need to add at least one more major determinant of trust when we move from the pure unilateral case to these mixed interactions. This is the tendency to form contractual and/or

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normative agreements in the exchange relationship.

When we move from the case in which one party holds all the coercive cards to that in which the participants have at least some cross-utility equality in the bargaining relationship, there appears a desire in the participants for a more legitimized and cross-situational form of trust than can be obtained from simply observing the other's past credibile or incredible actions (cf. Thibaut & Fauxheux, 1965). A contract is just such a limited and intra-situational method of legislating reliance or trust in bargaining interactions; essentially, both participants agree to some rule limiting the range of outcomes through which they can move the other, and usually employ some extra-situational agency to provide punishments should one or the other not abide by this agreement. Contracts thus should be viewed as insurance policies for reliability or trust, and one of the advantages of exchange over unilateral power relationships is that each party can insure the performance of the other at the sometimes low cost of being trustworthy himself. Bonoma et al. (1974) have found that such exchange contracts are much more likely to be implicitly entered into when inducements, and not coercion, is the mode of influence. There seems to be an asocial component to threats, and a contractual component to promises, which fosters the employment of the latter in exchange relations. However, it is interesting to point out that the same contract can often be interpreted in either an inducement (promises) or coercion (threats) manner: the deterrence theory of the sixties, for example, can just as well be construed as a promise by the superpowers not to strike first with nuclear weapons provided the other also promises to avoid preemption.

Norms also serve to restrict the range of outcomes one party to exchange can move the other through, but can be regarded as (1) inter-, rather than intra-situational, and (2) often the result of cultural accretion to which the

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present interactants subscribe but did not explicitly formulate for their own relationship. Thus, equity (Adams, 1965), reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), and responsibility norms all affect the nature of the bargaining interaction, but in most cases no explicit contract is entered into by participants to exchange regarding the fulfillment of these norms. Rather, they are accepted as cultural givens, as things which everyone knows and abides by who is at all civilized. Clearly, those who fulfill normative expectations during exchange relations will be considered trustworthy, while those who flaunt them will be considered definitely not to be trusted by anyone.

Thus, the trustworthy participant to exchange relationships is he who (1) is predictable (credible) from his past behavior to his present actions, and also (2) he who credibly fulfills any contracts which he enters with the other. Finally, (3) he who abides by culturally prescribed norms of exchange conduct is considered trustworthy, while he who flaunts these is viewed as definitely untrustworthy and unreliable, perhaps even if he fulfills the other two requirements.

Some implications for both the interpersonal and international decision maker who finds himself primarily in an exchange relationship with another include (1) the definite downplaying of unilateral and extra-exchange coercive options insofar as possible. This follows because to the extent that one resorts to unilateral and extra-normative coercion during an exchange relationship, one attempts to redefine the situation as unilateral power. The other, since he is not powerless and passive, must challenge and retaliate to such attempts, reducing the interaction to the purest and most non-productive force trades. (2) Exchange and bargaining relations cannot be easily entered unless the participants are power equals. No matter the humanity of the influencer, attempts to redefine essentially unilateral power relations into exchange relations must eventually lead to dissatisfaction on the part of source (since target

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has no sufficiently valuable utilities to exchange and no deterrents to source's unilateral actions), and the relationship will degrade to the unilateral level. (3) Exchange relations require some common cultural understanding between the participants. This implication may be a complicating factor in international negotiations, where one side's cultural understanding attributes concession to weakness, while the other views concession as an encouragement to reciprocity. (4) The principle of "bargaining from strength," taken literally, is absurd. This follows because either bargainers are relative equals or they would not be in such a relationship.

Bilateral Power

Although it is common to think of the "mixed case" just presented as true bilateral power, I suggest to you that there is a third form of power relationship which typifies the mutuality and dynamism of true bilateral relations, as well as a majority of social interactions occurring in everyday life. In this situation, we see neither turn-taking nor utility trading by interactants; rather, both participants want to achieve a common and joint goal, and the only question regards the dyadic (or triadic, or group) policy that will be undertaken by the social unit to achieve this goal. A paradigm example here is that of husband-wife interactions: to both themselves and the exterior world these two individuals are construed as a single social unit, acting as a unit with some joint policy toward a given end (e.g., buying a house). Social influence attempts are present, in that each will try to affect the other's consideration of what is the best joint policy to pursue (e.g., the wife tries to convince the husband not to buy a Porsche, the husband tries to convince the wife to give up graduate school). However, the key is that, once settled upon, this policy is binding on both (or all) participants equally. Alternative examples include democratic government, a couple buying a car (e.g., what model?, how much to spend?,) international negotiations on disarmament,

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and any other situation in which a social unit allocates joint resources toward a joint goal, where the initial policy preferences of the parties to interaction may be assumed to differ.

The only theoretical treatment of this instance I have been able to find in the traditional power literature is that offered by John Harsanyi (1962), who defines bilateral power in this context as the probability that one individual can get his preferred joint policy adopted when his alter prefers another joint policy for reaching the goal. Empirical work on this problem is almost totally lacking, though one can cite coalition literature (cf. Tedeschi et al., 1973), "commons" problems, and some recent work by Schelling (1973) as tangentially impacting on this area. What follows, in the absence of direct work, must be regarded as my completely unsubstantiated speculation on the operation of this sort of power interaction.

Although it seems clear that predictability (i.e., credibility), contractual and normative considerations would impact on truly bilateral interactions, it is my conjecture that the major determinant of both trust and influence effectiveness in this form of interaction goes a bit further than these considerations. I see as the major determinant of effectiveness and trust in bilateral power relations the demonstration by both (or all) parties to interaction that each holds a positive utility for the satisfactions (i.e., the utility schedules) of the others. That is, in this sort of interaction, trust appears when it becomes evident to the B that A's decision processes include as a primary component of his own satisfaction B's satisfaction with the joint policy adopted. Then, it does not matter if coercion is occasionally employed to get one's way with the joint strategy, if contracts are broke, even if norms are violated; in the face of consistent demonstration of a utility for other's satisfaction, it is tautological than any influence action engaged in by source must be partially aimed toward maximizing target's utility as well.

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Of course, when I say that this bilateral power interaction occurs more frequently than the others we have talked about in both international and interpersonal affairs, I am referring to the fact that joint policies are more often under consideration than are the unilateral policies of a strong vis a vis a weak player. More than the turn-taking logic of bargaining, and even more than the ubiquitous dilemma of the mixed-motive situation, it seems that individuals, groups and nations most frequently encounter conflict where the major issue is not what the participants ought to strive for (or how to divide it up), but how to optimally achieve the goal (e.g., world peace). I do not contend that either trust or influence effectiveness is often found in these interactions; rather, it seems to me that many potentially bilateral interactions degenerate into exchange relations simply because no party demonstrates an own-utility for the satisfaction of the other. This should not be surprising, for what I am proposing as the requirement for both influence effectiveness and trust in a true bilateral power relationship is Harry Stack Sullivan's definition of love rephrased in decision theoretical terms; it is also as close to the concept of altruism as a confirmed hedonist can come.

I am not sure how a demonstrated utility for another's satisfactions gets demonstrated, or how we can go about encouraging the development of these relations in interpersonal or international affairs. Sherif has showed fairly conclusively that a common threat is not enough to bring groups together by my definition of bilateral power relations; and certainly some 4000 years of history show that neither persuasion, understanding, nor compassion are significant modifiers. Surely a stage model postulating that reliable, normative interactions somehow "evolve" into bilateral relationships is disconfirmed simply by the number of interactions which never achieve mutuality or a bilateral nature. I think if I had to venture a guess on

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facilitative conditions for the development of trust in such interactions, I would have to put Sullivan's notion of security and Roger's concept of self-regard high on my list. Unfortunately, I am at a complete loss regarding how to translate these concepts into decision equations, and at an equal loss to apply them to international events. For today, then, I will have to take the social philosopher's refuge in pointing out to you (1) the apparent prevalence of this type of power interaction in everyday affairs and (2) the complete and total lack of conceptual and empirical work into the determinants of influence effectiveness and trust in this sort of interaction.

If these interactions occur even with half the frequency that my informal observations indicate, then the experimental question of "How do interactants acquire a utility parameter for the satisfaction of others?" becomes paramount. Equally urgent (and, I believe, empirically testable) questions center about the determinants of international or interpersonal security: it seems that we know what factors (e.g., threat perception) must be absent to promote security, but little about the facilitative causes of empirical domain of this construct. Certainly Roger's notion (1961) that, in the presence of positive regard, something like a utility parameter for others' as well as one's own welfare development ought to be integrated into "mainstream" conflict work. In short, the list of questions about what I am calling true bilateral relationships is endless: the list of answers, however, displays the opposite termination.

There are some implications to be drawn in passing about bilateral power relations, however, which seem clear even from a simple phrasing of the interaction type. (1) To the extent that all parties to interaction do not have a utility component for the satisfaction of the other parties to conflict, the relationship cannot be defined as truly bilateral (or multilateral). (2) It is irrelevant whether coercion, inducements, norm-fulfillment or norm-breaking

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is engaged in by source during these interactions; when trust is present, target will show neither retaliation nor fear. (3) Probably, though, most interactions of this type are limited to persuasion as the primary influence mode, since this mode seems the one which most clearly affirms the independent and equal nature of the target in the influence process.

. Parting Thoughts

It occurs to me that the scheme I am proposing might be regarded as somewhat similar to that advanced by Boulding (1964) in which he considered the coercive, exchange and integrative modes of international interaction. Though I am not sure he would evaluate the resemblance favorably, it is instructive to point out that after 10 years passage we still know the most about the most unrealistic form of power interaction (the unilateral), and least about those which require humans to pursue joint goals. Consequently, we know equally little about the conditions fostering bilateral trust and facilitating mutual and ameliorative conflict resolution.

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Footnote

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